

Monroe County Courthouse  
(Monroe County Office Building)  
39 West Main Street  
Rochester  
Monroe County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5641

HABS  
NY,  
28-ROCH,  
15-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5641

MONROE COUNTY COURTHOUSE (MONROE COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING) NY,

28-ROCH, 15-

Location: 39 West Main Street, at the southeast corner of West Main and South Fitzhugh Streets, Rochester, Monroe County, New York

Present Owner: The Supervisors of Monroe County

Present Occupants: Monroe County offices

Present Use: Office building

Statement of Significance: Designed by the locally noted architect J. Foster Warner, this third Monroe County Courthouse is reputed to be the first public building in western New York in the Renaissance Revival style. It is included within the civic complex known as City Hall Historic District, a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Cornerstone was laid July 4, 1894. The building was first occupied June 27, 1896.
2. Architect: J. Foster Warner. Warner continued his father's practice. A. J. Warner was Rochester's premier architect in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.
3. Original and subsequent owners: "... all that certain part or parcel of land in the village of Rochester, County of Monroe, (known in the plan or plat books as "Public Square" or "Court House Lot") ... bounded as follows: ten rods on Buffalo Street by sixteen rods on South Fitzhugh Street ..."

1821 Deed, May 24, 1821, Book 2, p. 135.

From: Charles Carrol and Ann, his wife; Nathaniel Rochester and Sophia, his wife; William Fitzhugh and Ann, his wife.

To: The Supervisors of the County of Monroe and their successors in office.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: A. Friedrich and Sons, Inc. was the general contractor.
5. Original plans: The firm of Pioch and Mellon, architects, retain the plans and commissions of J. Foster Warner.
6. Alterations and additions: A one story wing connecting the Courthouse with City Hall to the south was built in 1926, by John Strebel, architect. The exterior was cleaned and repaired in 1966, by A. Friederich and Sons, general contractors.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The 1894-96 structure is the third Monroe County Courthouse to be erected on this site. The first, costing approximately \$7,000.00, was erected in 1821-22. The second courthouse was completed in 1851, at a cost of \$70,000.00. In each case, lack of adequate space created the need for a new structure. The site, one of three proposed in 1821, was selected as the most centrally located and most convenient.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed, Office of Monroe County Clerk.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Lee, Florence. Monroe County Court Houses.

Rochester: Office of Monroe County Historian, 1961.

Peck, William F. History of Rochester and Monroe County, New York. New York: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1908.

Schmidt, Carl and Ann. Architecture and Architects of Rochester, New York. Rochester: Rochester Society of Architects, 1959.

2. Likely sources not yet investigated: The firm of Pioch and Mellon, holders of J. Foster Warner's plans, has refused access to them. Some contract records of the firm of A. Friedrich and Sons are in existence.

Prepared by Kevin Patrick Harrington  
Society for the Preserva-  
tion of Landmarks in  
Western New York  
December 9, 1966

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The finely executed, balanced facade of the exterior is complimented by the elaborate, yet dry, Italian Renaissance Revival interior cortile.
2. Condition of fabric: The building has received excellent maintenance.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: One hundred thirty feet by one hundred fifty feet; three bays by three bays; four stories; rectangular block and south single story wing.
2. Foundations: The highly dressed ashlar masonry walls are finished with a molded water table.
3. Wall construction: The dressed New Hampshire granite walls are slightly rusticated on the first story. Molded string courses divide the wall into three horizontal sections: the rusticated basement and first floor, the second and third floor which are treated as one unit joined by fenestrations, and the fourth floor which has a broken arcade of windows.
4. Structural system: The steel reinforced structural system may be the first instance in Rochester where Portland cement was used.
5. Chimneys: A dressed stone chimney is located at the southeast corner of the building.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The main entrance is composed of three Roman arched molded doorways framed by four Roman Doric columns set on high pedestals. The columns support a slightly projecting entablature which is topped by balustrade set with a solid central panel topped by a

pedestal flanked by carved scrolls. Three lamp posts with tapered iron standards and glass globes are set on the balustrade. In 1973, the original recessed doors were replaced by more functional plate glass panels set in the same doorways. The south wing west entrance has double doors set with a transom light and arched windows, all framed in a Roman arch.

- b. Windows: Paired basement windows are deeply set and divided by molded piers. First floor windows are similarly treated. A carved Corinthian keystone has been added to the face of the pier. Second and third floor paired windows are treated as one unit with molded Roman arched window caps set on a continuous molding which divides the vertical wall elements into pilaster forms. The paired round arched third floor windows are separated from the rectangular second floor windows by two sets of molded panels. The center north unit is composed of the paired center window flanked by simple round arched windows. A projecting balustrade similar to that of the main entrance immediately below is also fitted with lamp posts. The fourth floor round arched windows with Ionic columns and end pilasters are set in three groups of five on the north facade. The center arch is treated as a solid niche. The center niche, immediately above the third floor balustrade, contains a gilded statue of Justice which originally topped the 1851 Courthouse. The west facade is similarly treated. All windows are double hung, with single light sashes.
  - 7. Roof: The flat asphalt roof is fitted with crested eaves. There is a slightly projecting entablature with a plain corona, dentils, pellet frieze, and stepped cornice.
  - 8. Porches, stoops and bulkheads: The north entrance is set two steps above grade level. A narrow stepped stoop provides access to this entrance.
- C. Description of Interior:
- 1. Floor plan: A thirty-four foot square central interior court extends from the first floor to the roof. The court is open on all three upper floors; thus all office spaces open onto the square center corridor. The north interior stepped vestibule provides access to the center main hall, the base of the court.

2. Stairways: The paired open curving stairways rise from the east and west sides of the main hall to projecting circular landings at two thirds the height of the first floor. The curving rise continues to the north entering on the east-west corridor. The open oval stairwell to the north of the court corridor contains curved paired cases which rise to the landing with a single straight run to the third floor. The double case to single run continues from the third to fourth floor. The marble stairs are finished with foliate wrought iron balustrades and solid metal stringers. There are brass topped newel posts and brass handrails.
3. Flooring: The grey and white marble of the first floor is laid in a diaper pattern. Other corridor floors are laid with marble tile. Other floors are covered with linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The north vestibule has Siena marble walls and wainscoting. A coffered ceiling has a central panel fitted with a rosette. The corridor walls of the cortile are finished with marble wainscoting banded with richly veined marble baseboard and top molding. The ceilings are fitted with plaster panels set with guilloche moldings. The arcaded openings to the cortile are finished with ascending architectural orders. The first floor walls are finished with marble pilasters and free-standing Doric columns which support a banded cornice finished with a Greek meander. On the second floor richly veined marble columns with Ionic capitals support a round arched arcade fitted with spandrel medallions and composite corner pilasters. Low wrought iron grilles fitted with brass handrails are located between the columns. The third floor is similarly treated. The gilded plaster capitals are of the Corinthian order. The fourth floor has two arches per second floor bay, each fitted with a marble column and a gilded composite capital. The main bay system is retained by the application of paneled pilasters to piers, not columns, which are properly aligned on both cortile and corridor sides. A richly modillioned cornice separates the top of the fourth floor from the elaborately decorated attic level. Circular ventilation grilles, three per side, are set in molded medallions joined by festoons of swags, panels, cartouches, lions' heads and shell motifs in high relief. The cove molding fitted with undecorated panels framed by decorative plaster bundles of tied grain join the center cortile skylight to the elaborate wall composition.

5. Doorways and doors: Three glass doors flanked by marble pilasters with Corinthian capitals which support the entablature and arched windows provide access from the vestibule into the courtyard. All office doorways are framed with richly veined marble moldings. The top marble frame consists of a projecting molded entablature supported by side consoles.
6. Special decorative features: Several fireplaces remain in the rooms which were originally judges' chambers. The rectangular marble surrounds are framed by mahogany frieze and cornice with a variety of molding designs, bead and reel, dentils and egg and dart, all carried by detached Ionic columns.
7. Hardware: Most of the original door hardware remains.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: All offices are fitted with decorative cast iron ventilators. A c. 1916 steam engine remains in the mechanical area of the basement.
  - b. Lighting: The center of the ventilator grilles is actually a bulb receptacle. There are no lights present. Bronze wall sconces are mounted on the entablature encircling the first floor. Elaborate free-standing bronze lamps rest on the base of the vestibule handrails.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure, situated in the midst of the business and governmental heart of the city, faces north. The southeast corner of the lot contains a parking lot.
2. Historic landscape design: The building is set to the sidewalks to the northeast and west and connected to the City Hall to the south.

Prepared by Amy Hecker  
Society For the Pre-  
servation of Land-  
marks in Western New  
York  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project of twenty-six selections of historical and architecturally significant Rochester structures was undertaken in 1966, by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc., Mrs. Patrick Harrington, Executive Director, in cooperation with the Historic American Buildings Survey, James C. Massey, Chief. The project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Senior Historian. Architectural and historical descriptions were contributed by the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York, Inc. General photographic documentation was undertaken by Hans Padelt, Senior Engineer, Graflex, on a contractual basis with the Historic American Buildings Survey. The final documentation and editing was done by Susan R. Slade in 1978, for transmittal to the Library of Congress and the impending publication of the Historic American Buildings Survey New York State catalogue.